



THE LITTLEST WAVE

SUMANA CHANDAVARKAR



NEHRU BAL PUSTAKALAYA

THE LITTLEST WAVE

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For
AHALYA
who knows exactly
what this is all about

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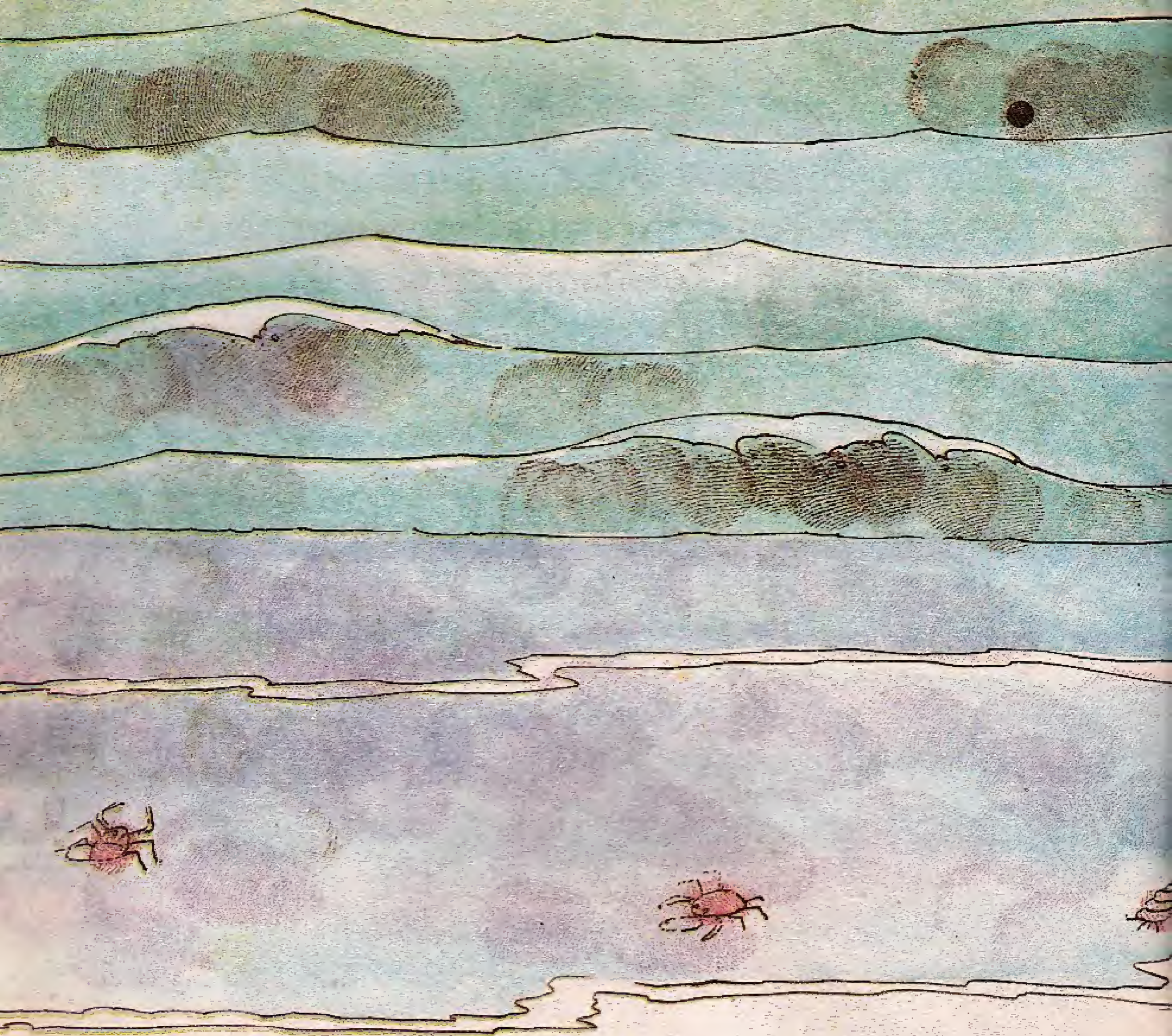
“The littlest wave is the nicest,” said Ahalya to her mother.



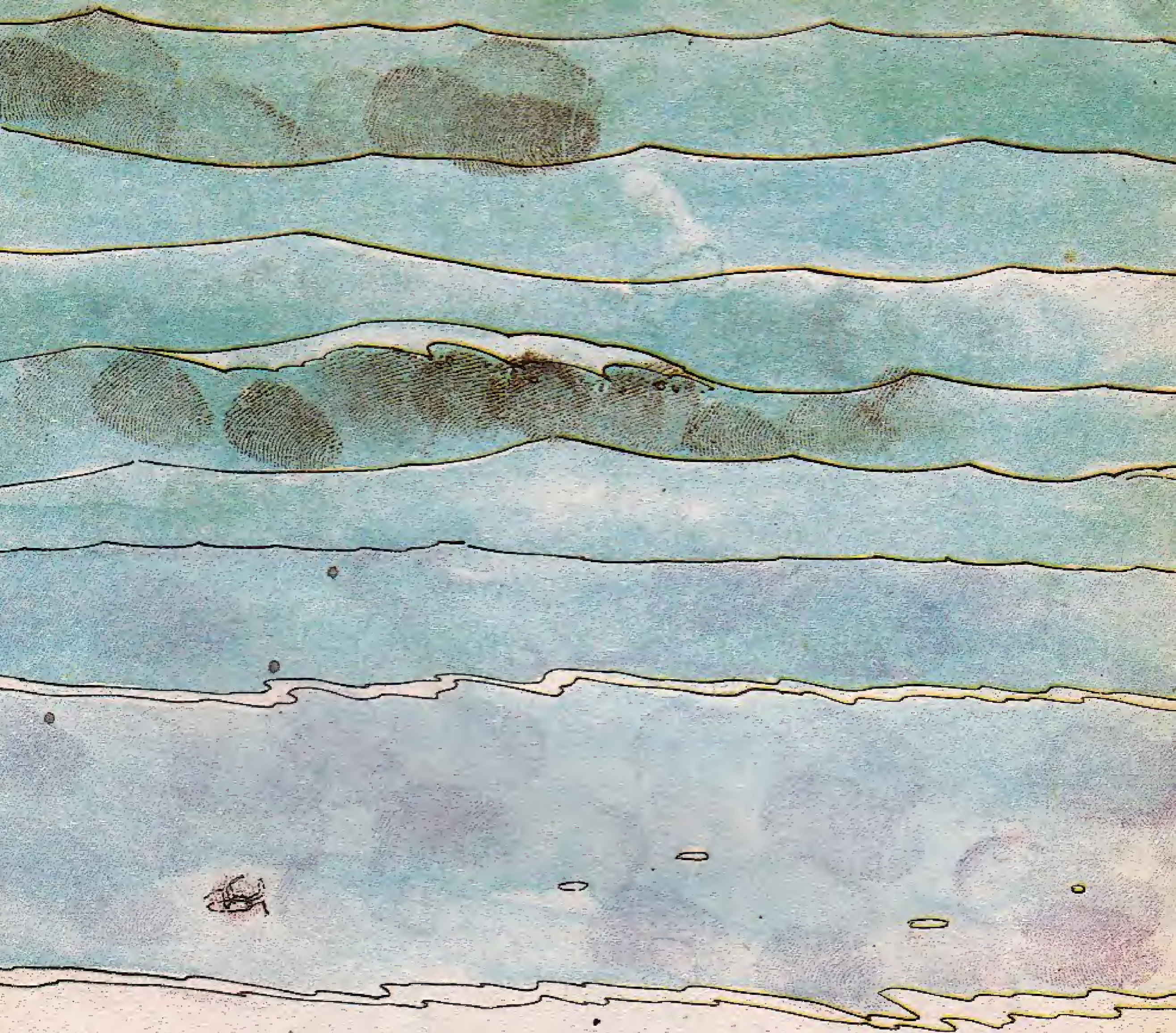


They stood on the beach, watching the tide.
Great big breakers rolled up, turned right over
and splashed on to the sands with a roar. They
wore white collars of foam and swept the beach
with large sheets of water.





After the big waves slid back, small crabs scuttled out of small round holes. Tiny shells glistened in the wet sand. That was fun to watch, but Ahalya did not like some of the other things the big waves did.



“They push you over.”

“Not if you know they’re coming,” said Ma.

“And they suck at your feet when they go back.”

“So do little waves.”

“But not hard. Little waves are gentle.”



And the littlest wave was the gentlest of all. It made a small lake around Ahalya's feet. It ran into the moat she and her mother had dug round their sand castle. And when it went back, the sand dried very quickly. Ahalya wished it could have stayed a while longer. But it never did.

Nor did it come often even when they were in the sea. Ahalya always knew the feel of the littlest wave. It was like no other—the nicest feel of all.







One morning Ahalya and her mother and father went down to the edge of the sea for a paddle.

“Maybe a swim?” said Father. And Ma said, “Why not? Look how calm the sea is.”





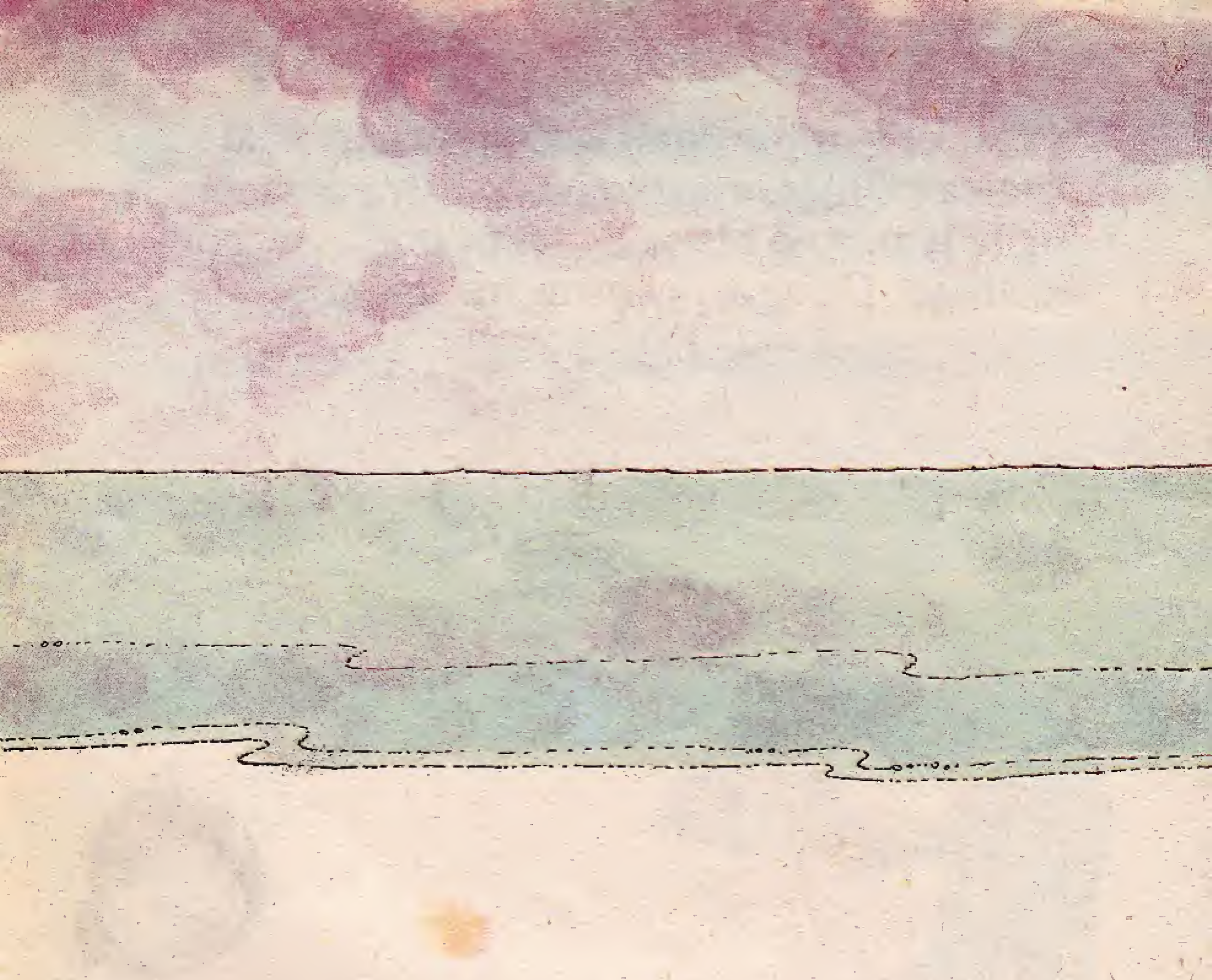
The big waves seemed to have gone to another part of the beach to turn their silly somersaults. Only the little waves were chasing each other.

The littlest wave came up to where Ahalya stood, waiting. It splashed lightly and whispered, "Come in and play . . . it's lovely." Ahalya shook her head. "You come up," she whispered back. "Let's build sand castles."



“Yes, let’s, if you don’t want to swim,” said Ahalya’s father, who thought Ahalya was talking to him. And Ma said, “Why don’t you both go ahead. I’ll have my swim and join you.”





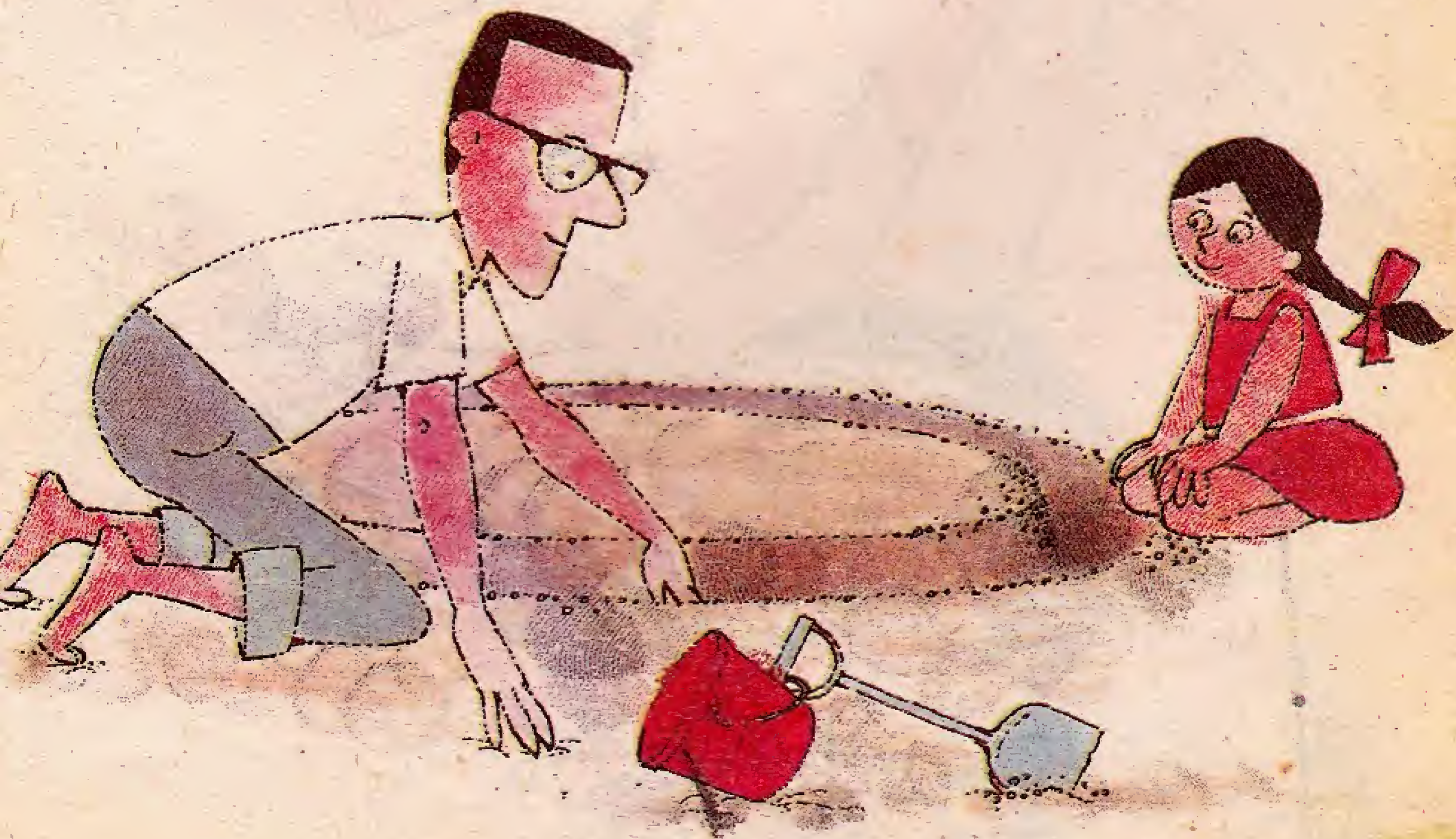
So Ahalya chose a new place to build their new sand castle. It was close enough to the sea for the littlest wave to come in.

But no waves came.

“Maybe because it is low tide,” said Father, who was busy digging up sand and making tunnels.

“What’s that?” asked Ahalya.

“That’s when the sea goes out, and you find more and more of damp beach.”





“You mean the sea goes back forever?”

Ahalya felt very sad. Surely the littlest wave would not have gone without saying goodbye?

“Oh no,” said Father. “It comes in again, as slowly as it goes out. And when it starts coming in, the waves splash closer and closer and closer up on the beach, just as they have been going out now. But it takes a long time. And then it is high tide.”

“The moon pulls the waters in and sends them out,” Father added.





Ahalya looked at the sky. The sun was up there, bright and warm, but the moon? It was nowhere to be found. If she had seen it, Ahalya would have told it what a mean trick she thought *that* was.

Now the littlest wave would not be able to come to the sand castle.

“I do wish the moon would change its mind,” she said crossly.

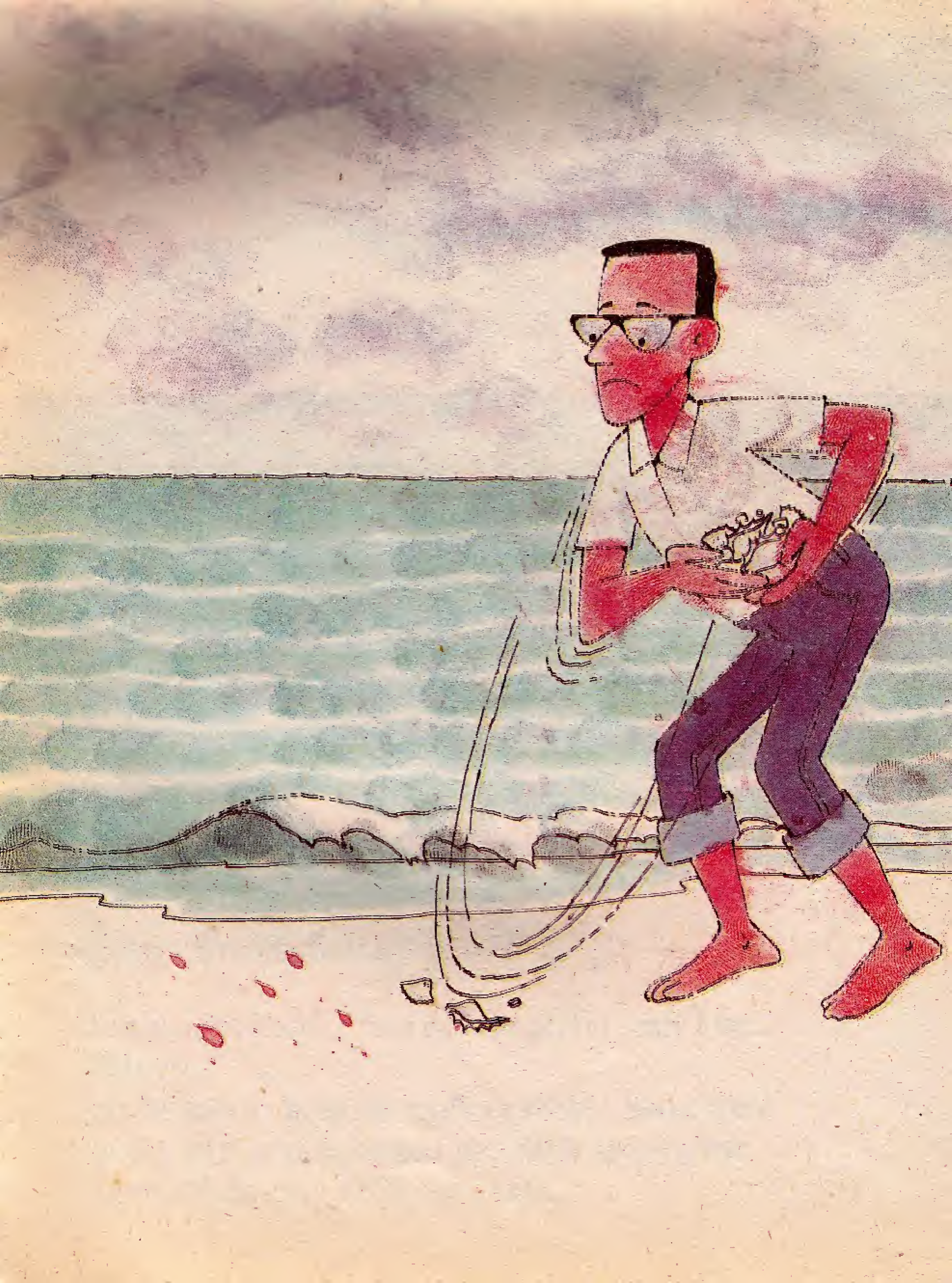




Father grinned. "Sorry, my girl, it can't be helped."

He began to help her collect shells. Soon they had a pile which he put in a little hole in the sand while they built the castle.





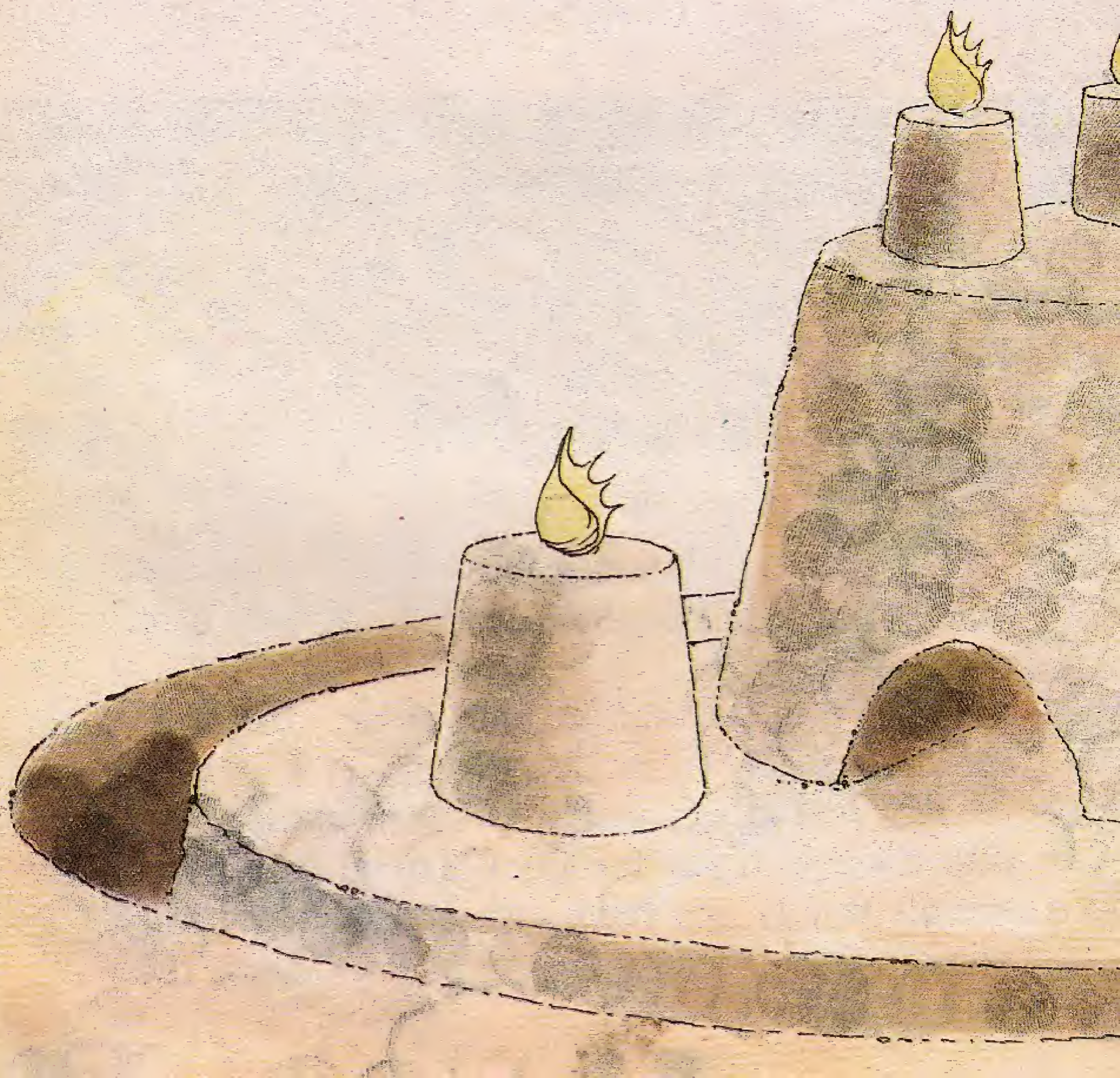


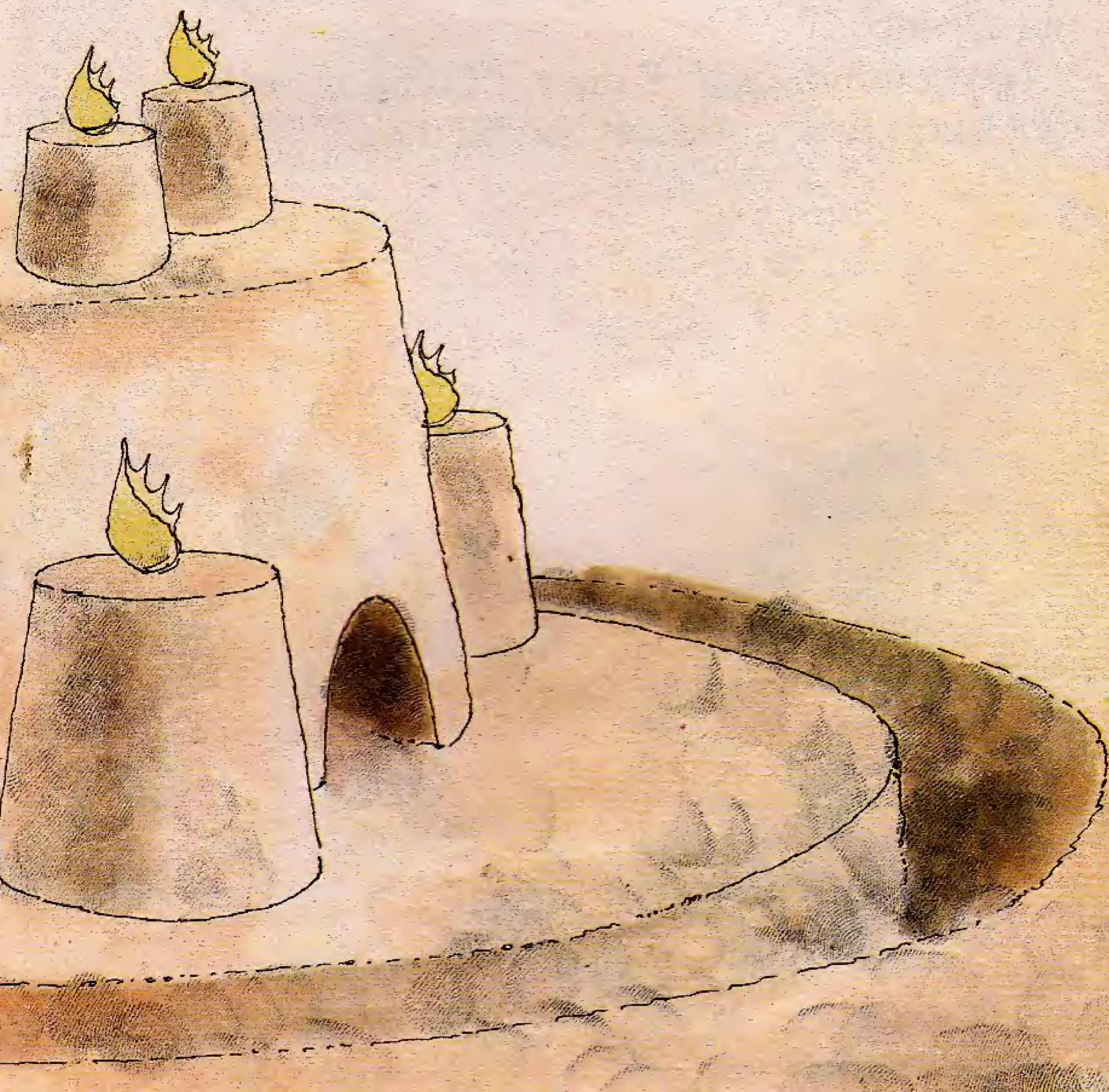
One of the waves sneaked up and nearly took them away.

‘No you don’t!’ said Ahalya’s father—and put the shells safely in another place.

Ahalya was sure it couldn’t have been the littlest wave. It was far too nice to do stupid sneaky things. But then—where *was* the littlest wave?

The sand castle was the biggest they had ever built. It had three turrets. Four tunnels. A deep moat with a sand wall all round. Sand towers made with Ahalya's bucket. The towers looked lovely with shells stuck on.





Ahalya's father tied his handkerchief to a stick and made a flag and stuck it in the topmost tower of all.

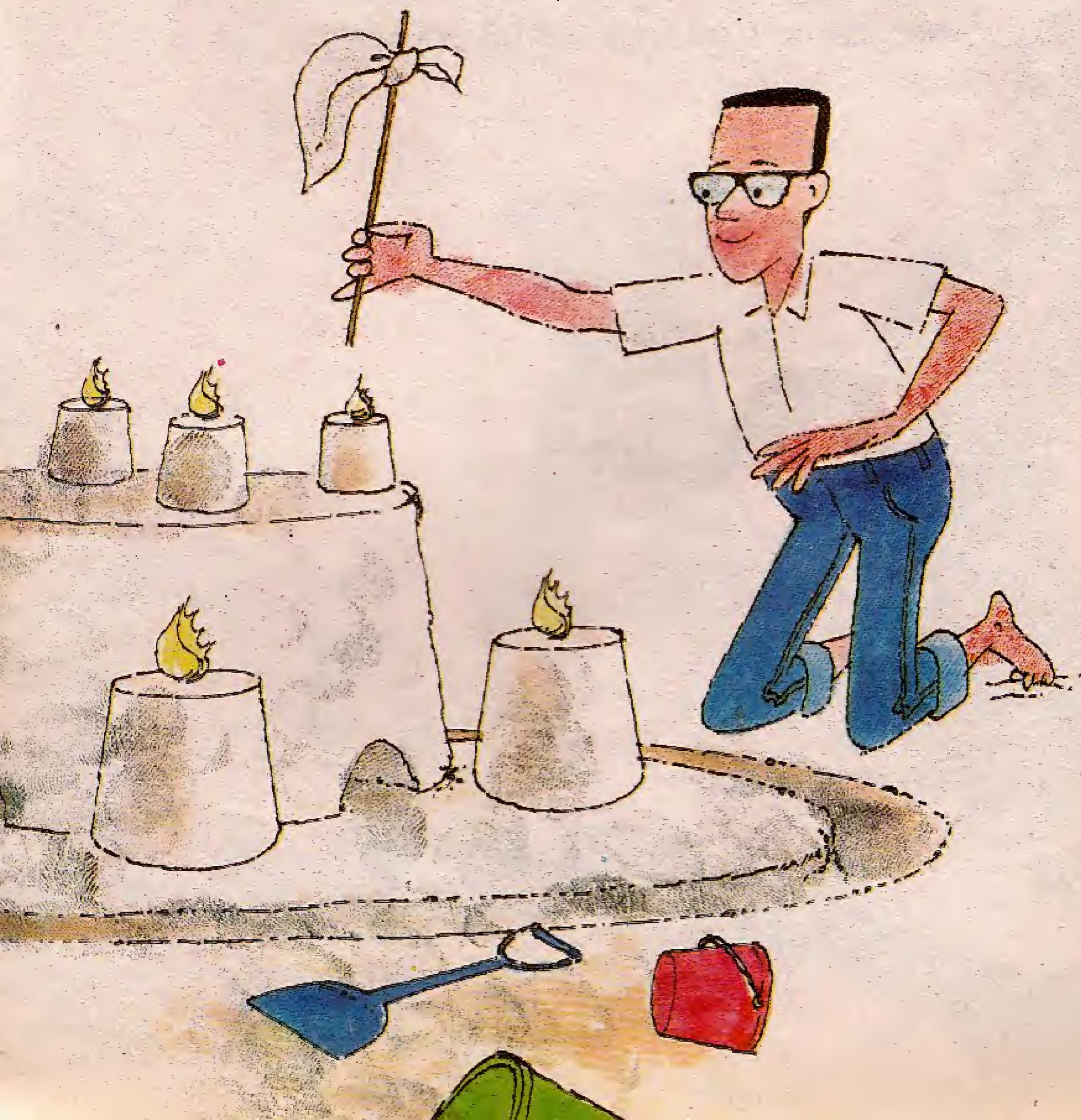
“Beautiful,” he said, stepping back to admire it.

“But the moat is dry,” said Ahalya in a small voice.

She felt very sad. The littlest wave had missed all the fun.

“Never mind,” said Father. “Come on, let's get water in your bucket and fill it up.”





Just then, Ahalya felt a small splash around her feet—and a trickle of water crept swiftly into the moat, filled it up—and stayed there!

“Sorry . . .” gasped the little wave in a voice that only Ahalya could hear.

Father couldn’t believe his eyes. When Mother returned from her swim, he told her, “But the tide was nearly out. Can’t think where this one little wave came up from—just enough to fill the moat!”





Ahalya didn't say anything. She put her hand into the moat so the little wave knew how happy she was.





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